heath
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# on ~~EXERCISE~~ MOVEMENT [=Health] Pt. II

Here is a list compiled from part one of this article featuring only the highlighted portions of text:

- **The ultimate context of life is never-ending movement**
- **Movement is nourishment**
- **No two movements are alike**
- **Balanced tension facilitates integrity**
- **From a movement perspective, of all the tissues in the human body it is the fascial tissue web that is of the highest importance**
- **We must move in ways that challenge existing adhesions between tissue layers and/or promote the continued differentiation of layers**
- **Whole muscles are not functional units**
- **It's imperative that we vary our movements to engage each and every fibre of our fascial tissue web**
- **Ideally we should move in ways that intentionally exercise our feedforward motor command**

These principles form a framework that allows us to evaluate the value of a particular movement. If a certain way of moving contradicts these principles then we are unable to conclude that it enhances our health; which is to say it doesn't enhance the way we move in daily life.

Ultimately, these principles should serve to guide and influence the intention behind our movements. We humans are curious beasts and it is our intellect that distinguishes us from the rest of the animal kingdom.[1] The vast majority of us still precede an action with a question used to full effect since early childhood: why? These principles satisfy the innate desire to know and based on the knowledge gained we may calibrate our intention.

It is the intention behind a movement that determines the subsequent outcome of it. Consequently, it is possible to perform the same movement with differing intentions and produce significantly varied results. For example, imagine you're out for a run. If your intention is to simply thump your feet into the ground one after the other until the torture comes to an end, you will most likely come to regret the experience as pain sets in over the ensuing days.

However, if you actively feel your way through each stride to ensure an unobstructed flow of body-wide movement, and to the best of your awareness your fascial tissue layers glide over one another without restriction, you stand a better chance of coming away from the experience well-nourished and feeling all the better for it. Furthermore, in this instance you could incorporate into your intention an awareness of subtle differences between each stride as the surface beneath your feet constantly changes.

To echo the ominous warning delivered in part one, not all movements are equal. There are several activities that directly contravene these movement principles. No matter how well intentioned you may be, by performing them you will inevitably cause yourself harm. Prior to evaluating common methods of exercise within our newly developed framework, we must clarify one of the aforementioned principles to facilitate the practical application of it & address something that quite literally stands in between you and a healthy connection with your environment as you endeavour to move through it.

We can effectively put to use all but one of the principles listed above without further discussion. When it comes to the importance of the fascial tissue web, we require a little bit more of an explanation before we utilise this principle for the better. It is impossible to produce movement on Earth without engaging at least some fascial tissue fibres. Thus even those exercises not advocated here will involve fascial tissue stimulation to a minor degree. However, movement predominately generated by lengthening and shortening of muscle tissue fails to comprehensively engage, and therefore nourish, our most important piece of anatomy: the fascial tissue web. Healthy movement is primarily due to lengthening and shortening of fascial fibres rather than muscle fibres. When this occurs the actual movement is produced by "lengthening and shortening of (the) fascial elements" where "the length of the muscle fibres changes little."[2]

The most comprehensive engagement of fascial tissues is achieved in two ways:

"Oscillatory movements, such as jogging or rhythmic hopping, (that) display an elastic spring quality" and,

"By activating the muscle against resistance in a lengthened position."[2]

Our final movement principle can now be put to use.

The final piece of information we must bear in mind pertains to perhaps the most pivotal piece of equipment we'll ever use whilst exercising: our shoes. The shoes we wear during exercise deserve particular attention because they often determine the quality of the connection between us and our environment. A shoe should not impair the natural functioning of the foot. During efficient locomotion, walking or running, we rely upon energy that is sent down to the ground to be recycled and sent back up into the system.[3] This isn't a problem when travelling on firm surfaces, because as much as we bear down on them, they push back on us.

It is soft surfaces that shatter our blissful unawareness. For example, "walking or running on soft sand is notoriously tiring because a portion of the energy in the (heel) pulse, which ought to be recovered at heel-strike, is dissipated into the sand."[3] To compensate for this loss we must increase muscular activity which renders the movement less energy efficient. Reading between the lines, too much cushioning beneath your feet makes whatever movement you are performing harder than it should be.

As a consequence, we should constantly compare the cushioning of a shoe against the activity being performed and the surface it's being performed on. If you frequently run on hard surfaces such as footpaths or asphalt, or participate in sports played on hard courts such as tennis or basketball, a sensible amount of cushioning is essential as it moderates the impact placed on joints. However, if you run exclusively on grass or firm sand then you may do away with shoes altogether and enjoy an uninterrupted connection with the Earth just as mother nature intended it.

As a general rule, consider shoes with a "zero drop" sole, which implies that the heel isn't elevated above the forefoot, an absence of excessive cushioning and as little arch "support" as possible. The issue of arch support isn't fully addressed without incorporating orthotics into the discussion. A healthy human body, which we now know is characterised by the balanced tension of her soft tissue, does not require external support; in the form of a walking stick or orthotics for example. Furthermore, as a structural concept the integrity of an arch increases as more weight bears down on it from above. In light of this, what purpose does immobilising it from below serve?

Before we venture into a discussion about the value of common forms of movement, we shall conclude with some food for thought. You may have asked yourself how efficiency fits into our new framework for movement. For the answer we must look to our evolutionary past: "from the moment the legendary fish emerged from the water and landed on solid ground, the development of anatomy (and how it's used) was shaped by the need to conserve energy."[3] If we wish to understand the product of millions of years of evolution, we best not deny efficiency its proper place on the mantel piece.

## Traditional Resistance Training (Weight Lifting)

Weight lifting is movement against resistance; and it contradicts effectively every single principle put forth. Conventional weight lifting refers to isolation exercises that aim to engage specific muscle groups individually. For example, bicep curls, bench (chest) press, push ups, military (shoulder) press, planks, situps, dead lifts etc. The emergence of Rolfing coincided with the rise of bodybuilding, a sport based solely on this form of exercise, and no-one was more despairing of its social prominence than Ida Rolf herself.

Isolation exercises aim to immobilise the entire body except for the region being trained, which increases the tension of the region being trained whilst ignoring the remainder of the tensional web. They replicate identical movements with each repetition to avoid variation, almost always fail to exhibit spring-like, elastic qualities, and are based on the belief that whole muscles are functional units.

The first of our principles tells us that life is constant motion; and in light of this reality we should aim to identify what isn't moving and mobilise it. Isolation exercises aim to do the opposite.

## Crossfit

A huge step in the right direction. One of Crossfit's mantras is that it's "constantly varied." Our body will adapt to what we repeatedly ask of it. We are creatures of habit and we are this way because it is efficient. Thus it's important to vary our movements so we retain the ability to successfully handle whatever the spontaneity of life throws at us.

However, it's important to approach Crossfit with caution. Whilst several of the exercises included in their workouts involve spring-like movements, isolation exercises still do feature and several more advanced exercises, like snatches, require highly refined coordination and are extremely dangerous if performed with poor technique. In addition, exercises involving jumping or high levels of resistance can place large amounts of load on the body.

The proof, as they say, is in the pudding. One look at a Crossfitter is enough to know that he or she is predominately a strength-orientated athlete. However, in principle as long as the strength (tension) is balanced body-wide, this needn't prove detrimental to health.

## Running

Running can be thought of as an amplification of walking. Ida Rolf was of the opinion that walking, in conjunction with breathing, represents complete, perfect exercise. It appears that a modern day view echoes a similar sentiment. In 2009, an American journalist named Christopher McDougall published a book bearing a title needing no explanation at all: "Born to Run."[4]

Running enables us to exercise effectively each and every principle discussed thus far. Of the highest importance is the fact that life is constant movement. Whilst running, or during any movement, there shouldn't exist any regions of stillness or holding. The entire body should be loose, relaxed and participating in the rhythmic flow of motion.

Despite running being a movement platform with huge potential, the vast majority of people who can be witnessed out on a run are quite literally running themselves into the ground. Particularly when running on hard surfaces, mild or acute tensional imbalance within your fascial tissue web can spell disaster for your body when exaggerated step after step. In an imbalanced body, disproportional forces lead to regions of stillness that can greatly accelerate deterioration rather than promote nourishment.

## Swimming

Man was born of the water, and it shouldn't come as a surprise that our body rejoices when we return to it. We are gravity bound beasts who unquestionably rely upon movement in gravity to provide us with nourishment. This fact is evidenced by the acceleration of the ageing process experienced by Astronauts whilst in space. However, we certainly enjoy a moments reprieve when we immerse ourselves in water and allow it to support us.

Water differs from an environment devoid of gravity because it acts as resistance as we pull ourselves through it during a stroke. Thus it stimulates our fascial tissue web and is nothing short of medicine for the body. The benefits of swimming aren't limited to the conventional strokes. We can exploit being fully supported when immersed to move in whatever way necessary to directly challenge adhesions within our fascial tissue web. Like running it is a complete form of movement; however without the load gravity places upon us.

## Cycling

Unfortunately cycling is where the trinity of movements that constitute a triathlon is broken. The steady movement of cycling doesn't exhibit a spring-like quality that engages fascial tissue. It isn't the elongating of fascial fibres that produces movement; rather it is the elongating of muscle fibres that is responsible for movement whilst the fascial fibres remain passive.[2]

Cycling is an activity typically performed for several hours over long distances. Thus it exposes our body to a less than ideal hunched-over position for prolonged periods; and because we are creatures of habit we quickly adapt to permanently adopt such a deviation. In addition, several muscle groups in the legs and pelvis are constantly engaged whilst the rest of the body is not; which gradually leads to a tensional imbalance on a body-wide scale.

## Yoga

Whilst many forms of yoga exist, the reference here alludes to static poses held for prolonged periods.

Most undoubtedly approach yoga seeking physical benefits; however for the vast majority a spiritual and/or psychological interest is often equally prioritised. In terms of the physical nourishment of the body, other forms of movement are arguably more efficient. However, given the gentle, progressive nature of each pose, yoga is unlikely to produce significant physical adversity.

As an activity yoga is characterised by stillness rather than movement and typically fails to include spring-like, elastic movements. As we are creatures of habit, exposure to prolonged yoga poses can lead to physical complications, as explained by Ida Rolf: "Repeated or habitual...yoga sitting patterns such as the Lotus can shorten the sartorius (a thigh muscle) on one side (of the body) more than on the other."[5] Consequently, an internal tensional imbalance will begin to develop.

However, concerns of this nature are often ameliorated with the right intention and awareness, and offset by what's gained in the mind and spirit in addition to the body.

## Pilates

Like Rolfing, pilates is named after the founder of the discipline Joseph Pilates; who, amongst other things, took a keen interest in bodybuilding. It is based on several core principles; not least of which a heightened strength of the abdominal muscles. Like all disciplines, the quality of the instructor leading a session is absolutely crucial. Ideally, every instructor will embody a sound understanding of how the movements they are leading influence the whole organism.

Unfortunately, in reality this often isn't the case. A pilates session, or series of sessions, tends to take on a strength based focus that risks leading to tensional imbalances within our fascial tissue web. In addition, exercises employed are often isolated to specific regions of the body. If a balance isn't struck with holistic, spring-like, elastic movements, muscle tissue quickly becomes the predominate focus and, as discussed, tensional imbalance a likely outcome.

## Ballet (Dance)

Whilst the burliest of rugby players would hate to admit it, you have to go far to find an activity more brutal than classical ballet. The body of a long standing ballet dancer is almost guaranteed to be ravaged by strict adherence to unnatural poses and a tensionally imbalanced posture maintained at all times. Ida Rolf provides us with an example: "Consistent eversion (outward rotation) of the feet in ballet positions can be accomplished only by continuous shortening of the muscles of the outside of the leg."[5]

Disorganisation in the lower leg can quickly defer above and below and precipitate all matter of unhealthy compensations: "When (consistent eversion) happens, knee and ankle must accommodate by rotating, and the leg as a whole loses it's beautiful, well-defined contour."

Fortunately, however, we shouldn't hastily write off all forms of dance. Modern dance, Zumba included, is largely free of formal poses and potentially represents pure movement; thus pure nourishment. If the whole body is free of stillness or holding, is loose, relaxed and participating in the rhythmic flow of motion, there is no reason why dance shouldn't be a rewarding experience for the body.

## Organised Sport

It goes without saying that the spectrum of movement encompassed by organised sport is wide ranging. The majority of organised sports enable you to exercise all of the newly proposed movement principles. In particular, organised sport offers us an opportunity to exercise our feedforward motor command in a unique way. As we've seen, a healthy individual embodies an ability to instinctively adapt to unpredictable stimuli randomly offered up by our environment. This capacity is seldom more beautifully showcased than when it's challenged by the spontaneity faced out on the playing field.

In addition to the challenge posed to tissue differentiation and coordination, organised sports also offer a choice of playing surface and equipment used. Whilst being of incidental value in a movement context, both individual and team sports normally transpire in a social environment that is full of fun and growth as a person.

However a consideration does exist that gives rise to caution. The spontaneity of sport is a double-edged sword and the reward is naturally accompanied by risk. Organised sports often push athletes to the limit of what their body can handle, which is where the risk of sustaining an injury is at its highest. That said, billions of sport crazed individuals all over the globe have had their say; more often than not the risk is worth it.

So, in an ideal world how should we move? Obviously, the answer differs for all of us. But you've asked, and it would be rude of me not to provide an answer.

My ideal weekly movement routine would consist of:

- Roughly 30 minutes (1500m) worth of lap swimming. Alternating between all 4 conventional strokes with dolphin kicking included.
- Roughly 30 minutes worth of jogging on a surface that falls somewhere in between a road and the beach in terms of hardness (e.g. grass), is slightly uneven and features inclines and declines.
- Roughly 30 minutes worth of crawling over, swinging through and hanging from a Spacenet.
- A team sport.

I'll leave it up to you, armed with your new-found knowledge, to explain why.

As for the intention behind these movements, we now know that in terms of health there is one enemy: stillness created by adhesions between fascial tissues. Whilst I might try to broaden my intention to encompass 2, 3 or 4 of these principles simultaneously, first and foremost I will always move to *challenge existing adhesions between tissue layers and/or promote the continued differentiation of layers*. That way movement will flourish, and nourishment along with it.

**Movement: the medicine of the body.**

**A space what?** A Spacenet. The ultimate tool to challenge your fascial tissue web. Not only does it allow you to put all of our movement principles to good use, it makes it practically impossible not to.

An idiot-proof way to move.

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**Heath Wiechman** apologises for being unable to discuss every form of movement known to man in this article. If your favourite activity wasn't discussed please feel free to get in touch with Heath and he'd be more than happy to run through it from a health-oriented perspective. Better yet, if you're based in Sydney pop in and visit Heath in his private Rolfing practice:

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